December 4, 2018

Senator Coley

Chairperson, Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

1 Capitol Square

Columbus, OH 43215

**Re: Opposition to HB 228, the “Stand Your Ground” bill**

Dear Chairman Coley and Members of the Committee,

My name is Nikki Foster. I am an officer in the US Air Force Reserves as a Major with 15 years of experience, and I’m a resident of Mason, Ohio. Thank you for giving me the time to hear my testimony.   I am here today to share with you why, as an Ohioan and a veteran, I am opposed to HB 228 and its sweeping rollbacks of public safety laws in our state.

As a US Air Force pilot, while I was deployed to Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan, I was required to carry a weapon 24/7.  We carried the weapons while flying combat missions and all day everyday while on base. Carrying the M9 handgun was required while flying in the event of a crash landing where we would have to defend ourselves.  Carrying the M9 on base was required in case of an insider threat. In both scenarios, we were armed for the worst-case scenario. Each soldier, marine, and airmen who carried these weapons was trained to load, clean, and aim the weapon as a necessity in combat during a time of war. This training encompassed 6 hours of training.

In Ohio, we have some sensible laws in place to protect our communities from gun violence and show our respect for responsible gun ownership in our state. These include laws requiring people to obtain a concealed carry permit to carry guns in public and seek safe alternatives before using lethal force in public.  The first of these policies would entirely undercut requiring a permit to conceal carry and the second would eliminate seeking safe alternatives if HB 228 becomes law.

This bill also undermines our concealed carry permitting system by effectively allowing people to carry hidden, loaded handguns in public without a permit. In combat, our military personnel are trained to handle their weapon beyond concealed carry permit holders. However, if HB 228 is implemented, it will functionally eliminate Ohio’s concealed carry permit requirement and encourage dangerous individuals to carry loaded handguns in crowded town centers and on city streets.

Ohio is not a war zone.  People should not be armed for combat. HB 228 will not keep our families safe; rather, it will gut existing public safety laws that do.  My husband Rob, who is also a veteran, and I have already endured family separation due to war and violence. We have returned home from war, several times, with honor to live more peaceful lives.

We all want to create a safer world where we do not have to fear that an unqualified and untrained person who has access to guns, could use the law as an excuse to do harm. I am asking that Ohio lawmakers vote no on HB 228. I hope I can count on you to do that.

-Nikki